Legends, living and otherwise

Many contributed to parish history

In the dictionary, legend is defined as a story or account handed down by tradition from earlier times. In current usage it may designate someone who has made a special contribution or lived a unique life.

As St. John the Evangelist Parish in Lafayette celebrates its 175th anniversary of its founding, it might be interesting to consider some people who by their lives, either in Lafayette or elsewhere, have made a special contribution.

There is also something unique about each one. The group includes four priests, one nun, four laymen and one lay woman.

It must be emphasized, this is a 175 year list, and it is MY list. As an active member of St. John's Parish for 24 years, serving also as reporter and chronicler of parish and diocesan news, I have had the privilege of knowing most of them personally.

Some have spent a great deal of time in Lafayette, others very little, all of them have a connection with St. John the Evangelist Parish. Doubtless other people would suggest others. These are my nominations.

Msgr. William J. Teurling, pastor from 1906 to 1929, and Msgr. A. J. Isenberg, pastor from 1929 to 1934, would head the list. Each served over 20 years as pastor, and made definite contributions in the growth of the parish, the building and completion of the church.

One of the living legends is Msgr. Jules O. Daigle, christened in the Church of St. John on Jan. 26, ordained priest in Rome on Dec. 19, 1929. He is well known as the author of the Blue Book Dictionary and Cajun Self Taught. In retirement in Welsh where he was pastor for 44 years, he is presently writing a history of the Parish of St. John.

Another unique contribution was made by Theodore Laxey, longtime sacristan for the church. Theodore was another one who always was there. Come rain or shine, early or late. Theodore was on the job, opening the church for early morning Mass, setting up the vestments and sacred vessels for Mass, lighting the candles. And after Mass, there were things to be put away, locking up to do. How do you put a value on 40 years of such service? Theodore had a great reward waiting for him when he arrived in Heaven.

In his 70th year of priesthood, Msgr. Jules O. Daigle is obviously the oldest living priest not only from St. John's Parish, but the Lafayette diocese. In my book, he's a living legend.

Who can gauge the value of years of service, present and ready to help whenever needed. Arthur Boulet has been an usher in St. John's Parish for over 50 years and he is still doing it. He walks a little slowly, but he is still faithful. He can recount the major events, the installations of bishops, and numerous ordinations, the countless Sunday Masses, weddings, you name it. Arthur is always there, always on the reserved seating, the special guests. He was a parish honoree in 1990, receiving a Papal Blessing and medal from the diocese in recognition of his years of service.

Another living legend has deep roots in the parish. Marie Louise Jeanmard was a parish honoree in 1990, and her citation noted her lifetime membership in the Ladies Altar Society and her loving care of altar linens. She is still involved, during Holy Week I saw her checking the altar, to be sure it was properly dressed. She comes naturally to this devotion to the church; she is a niece of the late Bishop Jules B. Jeanmard, first Bishop of Lafayette, and grew up with a thorough instruction in the tender care of church vestments and linens.

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Many well known in Lafayette, but one of our own, she was christened in St. John's, in 1897. Sister M. Odeide Mouton had an outstanding record as a Religious of the Sacred Heart as a teacher, counselor and administrator. Even in retirement she continued to teach part time at the Academy of the Sacred Heart, Grand Coteau; managed lay women's retreats and wrote a monthly column for the diocesan newspaper.

Another who was christened at John's, on April 4, 1915, and went on to great things was Rev. C. J. McNeasy, O. C. M.

Sister M. McNeasy, O. C. M., ordained for the Order of the Sacred Heart in 1945, celebrated his first Mass in the cathedral, and went on to be a teacher, musician, college administrator, author of 29 books. He was also a linguist, speaking seven languages. Described after his death in 1995 as a "true Renaissance man," Father McNeasy was a unique combination of priest and scholar. Surely he is one of the legends of St. John the Evangelist parish.

Another layman, gone from the scene, but still well remembered, is Thomas M. Caffery, who was editor of the Lafayette Advertiser for many years. He was a militant Catholic, held local and state office in the Knights of Columbus and Rotary International. In demand as a public speaker, he was not afraid to speak his defense of moral and family values, in the newspaper as well as vocally. A member of St. John parish, he was involved in campaigns of support for the Solemn Mass for Our Lady of the Rosary on Oct. 15, 1971.

Arthur Boulet arrived in Lafayette in September 1942, went to the University of Notre Dame in 1945 and served in the navy. He received his law degree in 1948 and then went on to become a judge in the civil district court in Lafayette. He is a living legend.

Rev. C. J. McNeasy, O. C. M., was the last of the 175th anniversary honorees. He is a living legend.